

Eliseo Neuman     Testimony before the     United States Commission on  
International Religious Freedom

September 24, 2008

Madame Chairwoman

Thank you for this opportunity to share my views on implementation challenges concerning Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement

and to venture recommendations for related US policy.

I wish to focus on a key requirement for the CPA's success that cannot be emphasized enough, namely, that the peace between the North and the South must afford immediate, palpable dividends in greater economic and political enfranchisement for the widest possible section of Sudanese society.

This is particularly the case in the South, where development needs are most acute and where the institutional framework to address them is most lacking.

There, the SPLM faces the challenge of transitioning from a sometimes fractious liberation movement to an effective state builder and administrator---this, within the fixed timetable imposed, for better or worse, by the CPA in the form of elections in 2009 and a referendum in 2011.

Many hoped that the CPA would be transformative for all of Sudan.

That it would encourage an armistice between two warring factions to graduate into an all-inclusive peace process with two alternative, amicable outcomes.

And that it would achieve this through the implementation of trust-building, interim steps over six years, creating positive externalities for parties other beyond those two factions.

It must be said that, while compliance with the CPA to date has been faulty, the NCP and the SPLM have avoided crossing certain bright lines.

The reason is not a communion of interests or growing trust between them but their shared aversion to the alternative: a relapse into civil war, which at present both find sub-optimal.

In this sense, the CPA has remained essentially a mere armistice.

Paradoxically, general adherence to it today accomplishes opposite strategic objectives.

It enables, at once, the NCP peacefully to prevent its loss of the South and the SPLM peacefully to secure an eventual secession.

This equilibrium, however, has an increasing chance of weakening as 2009 and, especially, 2011 draw near.

Absent the ballast of a broadening field of stake-holders in the CPA, its transformational objectives remain at risk.

It is not only the political and security-related implementation provisions of the agreement that compromise its future.

Smaller, unaddressed local disputes over resources, land, and property rights (involving farmers, pastoralists, traders, sharecroppers, squatters, and returnees), not only in border areas, can also threaten to undermine the entire architecture of the peace.

If the SPLM is to enjoy a robust endorsement in the 2009 election, it must successfully resettle, absorb, and enfranchise IDPs, refugees, and diaspora-each, a population with its own distinct needs and abilities.

A weak showing for the SPLM

in 2009 would further fracture the political spectrum, invite spoilers, and only erect further hurdles to the implementation of the CPA.

Significant efforts were expended over the last two years to encourage returnees to the South in anticipation of last April's census.

Yet parallel efforts to provide promising conditions for their assimilation have lagged and their situation remains precarious.

This, added to a sense of insecurity fostered by episodes of violence, such as in Abiey last May, discourage a segment of returnees that is important to the building of South Sudan, namely, the skilled members of South Sudan's diaspora, who are left to weigh an uncertain future there against the relative comfort of their present lot elsewhere.

The US government should spare no efforts, through the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration and USAID, in support of UN agencies and NGO partners facilitating the orderly and humane resettlement and integration of IDPs, refugees, and diaspora populations in the South.

An estimated 50% of refugees wish to return to South Sudan.

UNHCR and IOM, respectively, are the preferred channel for the voluntary repatriation of refugees and the resettlement of IDPs.

Together, they have overseen only 10% of returns to date, with UNHCR reportedly facing diminishing support from the donors to its program.

The remaining 90% have been "spontaneous" or "self-assisted" returns, which compounds existing challenges in planning and monitoring a successful integration.

It is hard to overstate the organizational vacuum and infrastructure deficiencies that greet returnees in South Sudan.

In this regard, existing USAID programs, particularly those under the current labels "Investing in People" and "Economic Growth" (and especially those involving health, education, and infrastructure) should be supported.

The US government should also support robust technical assistance programs aimed at building central and local government capacity to plan and implement the integration of returnees, whether under the Deputy Minister of Regional Cooperation for Diasporas or elsewhere in the GOSS.

The US government should encourage better outreach and public information on the subject of returns.

This would both assist IDPs and refugees in their decision to return as well as neutralize discrimination against them by local populations.

Distressingly, most of the numerous infrastructure projects currently under construction in South Sudan are being completed by non-Sudanese contractors employing non-Sudanese labor (principally Ugandan and Kenyan), something that is hard to miss by any visitor to Juba.

USAID, in its Strategy Statement for Sudan for the period 2006-2008, recognized the need to spur indigenous expertise through capacity development, skills transfer, and training programs.

It further singled out the need to engage skilled Sudanese diaspora members through scalable voluntary service programs in health, education, and economic growth.

The US government should dedicate robust resources in support of such programs.

Given its decisive role in brokering the CPA and its investment in the agreement's success since then, the US government should lead efforts to improve coordination among international donors as well as between such donors and the GOSS.

Inefficiencies resulting from this lack of coordination are significant and result in avoidable donor fatigue.

Finally, given the need to extend broadly economic and political enfranchisement through the peace dividends of the CPA, the US government should use every means at its disposal to encourage improvements in transparency, accountability and good governance in connection with the assistance it dispenses.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to address you and your fellow commissioners this morning.